



# Foundations for Peace

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## Major Conference in New Delhi - 26th February 2010



On February 26th 2010, the Foundations for Peace (FFP) network hosted a strategic Conference in New Delhi entitled '**The Role of Philanthropy in Peace Building Efforts to tackle Social Injustice in South Asia**'. Facilitated by the Dalit

Foundation, the event focused on structural injustices in Nepal, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka and looked at the many innovative efforts undertaken at the differing levels of the chain of interventions to build peace and equality. South Asia is a region where violence, injustice and conflict have become entrenched in societal, political and economic structures. Caste is an overarching issue plaguing the region, entwined with divisions caused by gender, ethnicity, religion and economic disparities.

The conference drew on the efforts and experiences of grass-roots activists and the role of indigenous and external philanthropic contributions in effecting a sustainable impact on social justice and peacebuilding work. FFP members, their representatives and grantees spoke passionately about the need for further support and resources to enable them to deliver their work on the ground as well as the need for policy makers, politicians and others to act in tandem with them to tackle structural injustice.

FFP members from Serbia, Georgia and Northern Ireland also participated in the event. Truly unique, the event had keynote inputs from Avila Kilmurray from Northern Ireland, Gagan Sethi from the Dalit Foundation, Syeda Hameed from the Planning Commission, Government of India and Sharmila Tagore, a renowned Indian film actor. Representatives of four philanthropic bodies – The Ford Foundation's Vanita Mukhergi, Christian Aid's Belinda Bennet, the MacArthur Foundation's Poonam Muttreja and SDTT's Nayana Chowdhury- all made very thought provoking contributions.

Setting the thematic framework of the conference, Gagan Sethi (Board member, Dalit Foundation, India) used these inspiring words: 'You are in India – the land of contradictions. This country contains some of the most beautiful examples of peace and some of the most violent forms of human indignity. For those of us living this dialectic, we have to maintain a balance between experiencing these two extremes.' Elaborating on the Dalit Foundation, he said that it responds with compassion to centuries of caste conflict and while initially the Dalit struggle had to be exclusionary to establish identity, there is a need to not only fight the caste battles but compassionately reach out to all those who believe in equality. For this reason, they changed the definition of 'Dalit' to mean not just the beaten-down lowest-of-the-low castes but instead all those who believe in and fight for equality. 'This is a

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## **Editorial...**

# **Why an emphasis on social justice?**

The concept of social justice can mean different things to different people when considered in various societal contexts and in different parts of the world. For the Foundations for Peace Network, a social justice approach entails striving for structural change both within, and between, societies by increasing consciousness of the implications of the existing distribution of power and resources, and identifying strategies for change. There is also an emphasis placed on working with disadvantaged or marginalised groups to augment their self-awareness and mobilisation in order to challenge the consequences of unfair political, economic, environmental and social systems. Proactive social justice work is not about alleviating or addressing the symptoms of injustice alone, but rather about highlighting and confronting the causes of such injustice. Systems and attitudes that perpetuate injustice must be transformed, and those groups of people that have been excluded, disadvantaged, oppressed and/or marginalised must be supported to define their own struggles for human rights, equality and justice.

Social justice is often conceptualised in terms of distributive justice, with an emphasis on how advantages and resources are distributed to people across a society. Within this framing of the issue, questions are asked as to 'What do people owe one another as a matter of justice?' The linkage between social justice and the rights of citizens has thus been linked in the preamble of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) –

*“The ideal of free human beings enjoying civil and political freedom and freedom from fear and want can only be achieved if conditions are created whereby everyone may enjoy his economic, social and cultural rights, as well as his civil and political rights”.*

However this aspiration also requires an awareness of the need for equity of participation in decision-making and of what has been termed 'positional injustice'. The latter results from situations where the social positioning of a group, or community, of people can mean that there are limitations on their opportunities and access to power. This can occur where there is a 'lack of fit', or disjuncture, between the attributes of certain groups and the dominant societal structures, attitudes and perceptions. Where social justice is lacking, the potential for violent conflict is enhanced.

## **The interface between structural injustice, conflict and peacebuilding**

Structural violence is a situation where discrimination, oppression and marginalisation are experienced by specific groupings or classes within society. Where action around issues of structural injustice moves from a position of latent conflict into overt conflict, then approaches to both social injustice and peacebuilding collide. Overt violence added to existing structural violence often creates a situation in which everyone perceives themselves as oppressed or worse off than they were before.

## **At the heart of the inferno - the no-go of violent conflict.**

Many philanthropists feel that there is little that they can effectively contribute during the course of violent conflict, and it is true that in extremely sensitive, and often complex, situations, they have to tread with care. It is not true, however, to suggest that nothing can be done until the last bullet has been fired and the last bomb defused. Indeed, it is the experience of many societies that credibility is developed when philanthropists are prepared to work with communities in crisis; such work is often quiet and supportive, rather than headline grabbing or invasive.

Where the indigenous funder is committed to peacebuilding and social justice, they can provide a mapping of the challenges, opportunities and activities in their particular society and can act as the on-the-ground partners of external philanthropists. They are then trusted hands when post-conflict work is needed.

## **And what can we do?**

Social Justice philanthropy sets itself the task of working in partnership with those people that have been disadvantaged in order to redress the inequities experienced. Social justice philanthropy, in the context of peacebuilding, understands conflict within the broader framing of social injustice and works to achieve a form of conflict transformation that will also address these injustices. However given the complexities of any particular conflict prone, or conflict ridden, society, it is important that external philanthropists – and Development Aid agencies – take the time to listen to the insights of indigenous Funds and Foundations, and where a shared value base is established, to work in partnership with them. There is invariably so much to be done that there is room for all hands to be set to the wheel of conflict transformation.

## **What indigenous independent Funds and Foundations can offer includes -**

- Acting as a knowledge hub of the local conditions and particularly being sensitive to the adverse impact of violent conflict and social injustices on specific communities and groups within their society.
- Being open to a range of different approaches – both grantmaking and non grantmaking roles – in order to proactively support work around peacebuilding and social justice.

- Offering a convening role which can bring together groups across sectarian, ethnic, caste and other divides, and working with partner organisations and initiatives to ensure that this can happen safely. This will include the creation of safe spaces in which conversations on sensitive and controversial topics can take place.
- Networking at community level with potentially marginalised or excluded groups and testing ways to support their active participation in alliances for change.
- Acting as a bridge between different levels in society
- Offering flexible and timely grant delivery – in situations of rapid change, as often occurs during peacebuilding, a small grant made in a timely and flexible manner can be more effective than a larger grant.
- Helping to develop broad platforms/alliances to build cooperation and solidarity around issues of social justice and peacebuilding. This can entail indigenous Funds and Foundations using their position in society and their reputational capital to stand by advocates for change.
- Acting as a channel for external philanthropy and/or Development Aid agencies either through a partnership approach to the delivery of funding or as a source of active consultation.
- Offering a signposting service for external funders, particularly in terms of advising on how planned interventions might be interpreted (or misinterpreted) and applying a peace and conflict impact assessment with regard to proposed initiatives.

Using small sums of money to achieve a big impact on sensitive and difficult issues requires the willingness and ability to move outside the comfort zone of much philanthropic grantmaking. What the external philanthropic partner brings is not only money, but also a macro perspective and contacts that can be incredibly important in situations of violent conflict. What the local partner contributes is not just the added value element and the micro 'pulse' of the situation, but also the guarantee of living with the decisions taken. It is this combination that can deliver an effective strategic approach. Ultimately, those who are suffering as a result of violence and social injustice should expect no less.

- *Avila Kilmurray,*

*Community Foundation for Northern Ireland.*

'Small Money, Big Impact' (2009) is a publication compiled by the Foundations for Peace Network to present a very varied range of case studies that comment on the importance of philanthropic contributions to social justice and peacebuilding work in divided and conflict torn societies. It is a companion publication to the Policy Paper produced by FFP entitled 'Social Justice, Peacebuilding and the Contribution of Philanthropy'. Both publications are available as PDF folder on the FFP website- [www.foundationsforpeace.org](http://www.foundationsforpeace.org)

## Work to empower women affected by war in Georgia: The Taso Foundation



Like other Republics of the Soviet Union, our country, Georgia, has lived for over seventy years within the borders of the Soviet Union. Different periods of those years were characterized by repression and atrocity as the Soviet regime made its presence strongly felt. Under the terms of Stalin's Constitution, the Republics were free to leave the Soviet family and become independent states at any time. However, we in Georgia knew that this would be very difficult and, if the Soviet Union collapsed, our country would also end up ruined. Many states struggled to make the progression to become free, democratic states.

Clearly, the populations of the majority of the newly established independent states were not prepared for independence or for the challenges of progressive democratic development. The Soviet military units stationed in the so-called post-Soviet space took advantage of this and distributed weaponry widely in order to have people, who were united in accordance with their political interests, religious or ethnic belonging, slaughter each other within the newly established states as they grappled with path of democratic development.

Despite generous aid from the West to help build democracy and political independence, the impact of global political processes contributed to the poverty of the majority of the populations. Bloody conflicts and a range of related problems regularly threatened stability. When the bloody conflicts were halted, the West entrusted the mission of peacemaking to Russia's military. Like the many prudent and honest individuals working to support those impoverished by war in the 90's, civil society organizations at the beginning of the 21st century wound up sharing the role of executors of emergency aid and rehabilitation works for the victims of the many conflicts. And so it was with the work of the Taso Foundation at that point.

On the night of August 8, the increasing exchange of fire as part of the conflict in the Tskhinvali Region, Kartli, paved the way for a bloody war. The war spread and in a just few hours, the Russian army had entered East and West Georgia by way of crossing the administrative borders of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, bringing with it the punitive forces of Ossetian and Chechen militants, to set up and fortify a military camp.

Needless to say, it was mainly civilians that were killed and wounded

and had their houses burned down. Georgia lost 122 villages, including those near Abkhazia, in the Kodori Valley. During the first day of the five-day war, more than 100,000 internally displaced persons (IDPs) flocked to Tbilisi, the capital. In the course of the following months, the majority returned to the villages of the Shida Kartli Region that were “ceded” by Russia; but 35,000 joined the number of the IDPs displaced previously as a result of the conflicts in the 90s.

Starting August 11, Taso began to work with Georgian citizens and other NGOs to provide food for IDPs and supply children and women with primary necessities. By September, we reassessed the situation and began to develop projects in order to solicit funds for victims of the conflict by developing activities in two core directions:

- economic empowerment of the population to start income generating endeavors/small businesses by means of grants and
- stimulation of the population's social activity.

The first was the project for economic empowerment of women in eight villages of the Shida Kartli Region and a camp for IDPs (Donor: *Bank of Georgia Aid Fund for the Victims of the Conflict in Georgia*). The second project followed in a few months: *Karaleti Women's Center for Combating Violence and Community Development* (Donors: *Norwegian Refugee Council and Eurasia Partnership Foundation*).

We started to work in the conflict zone on March 12, 2009 and by the end of 2009, had conducted the monitoring of the 53 grants that were issued. It is always vivifying to work directly with rural women and one can imagine how emotive was our interaction in villages where people had just recently experienced the death of a family member, torture and loss of home and livestock. The women were able to point at the surrounding hills from where guns were aiming at them and explain to us that while their homes are on this side of the hills, their orchards and livelihoods are “on the other side”. Some village even had their cemeteries end up “on the other side”. Everyone is a victim here; and as victims, they are all passive members on the humanitarian aid distribution list.

We worked with the women to explain that our project was not about 'aid' but rather about empowering them to build projects that would help them in the longer term to survive and develop. Through empathetic listening, we gained their trust and supported them to write their own proposals resulting in us being able to finance 53 projects.

A further significant development was that UNIFEM, with support from the Association of Young Economists of Georgia, involved all applicants in a one-year educational program in small business development, adding further to the empowerment of the village women. Recent monitoring showed that endeavors supported by us (ranches, pig-breeding, rabbit-breeding, poultry farms, etc) are vital for the families of the grantees and so the farm diversification programme enabled by our support was very

important. This, therefore, is a story about education to improve the country's agricultural policy; a story to empower women to change things for themselves.

Our second project involved an office facility being built to create space to provide services for individuals and the mobilization of the community; developed an educational program in HRs/women's rights and connected communities with organizations/agencies that provide relevant support while providing facilities for Civil Society organizations & Government officials. Most importantly, it formed groups of socially active women and we are thankful to the Open Society Institute for enabling us to develop and intensify this project.

The project completed in May 2010 and its outcomes are already very evident. The most important among them is the establishment of a group of motivated women representatives from several villages who implement humanitarian activities for internally displaced persons and socially vulnerable members of the population. Our grant programmes, therefore, went far beyond the delivery of humanitarian aid. Their legacy is the empowerment of women to help themselves and their communities; the enabling of women to develop livelihoods and community services to sustain them in the longer- term - the development of skills for life.

*- Marina Tabukashvili  
Marina is the Director of Taso,  
a women's foundation and memory research centre based in  
Tbilisi, Georgia.*

## Major Conference in New Delhi - 26th February 2010

move,' he said, 'from an exclusionary to an inclusionary position, part of building an India free of identity politics, and DF represents the peacebuilding process within the Dalit movement.

The conference also presented an opportunity for Foundations for Peace to launch its case studies publication – Small Money Big Impact – which features very relevant case studies showcasing the groundbreaking work of the members. A major policy publication was also launched – Social Justice, Peacebuilding and the Contribution of Philanthropy and is summarised in the editorial. Both publications are available on the FFP website <http://www.foundationsforpeace.org>.

We take this opportunity to extend the thanks of the FFP network to the Dalit Foundation staff and in particular, its Executive Director, **Santosh Samal**, and his very able assistant, **Chandrika Sahai**, for the sterling work they put into the organisation of the event.